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ABSTRACT

Perceptions of advising held by new faculty, department heads, and administrators were investigated in 1981, and the need for training faculty for advising was explored. Questionnaires were completed by 18 new faculty and 25 department heads at George Mason University, Virginia, and 8 administrators were interviewed. Although the majority of administrators, new faculty, and chairs believed that advising is important, seven of the eight administrators ranked publications, research, and teaching as more important than advising. In addition, three administrators also ranked university service and grants as more important than advising. A large percentage of the new faculty reported that their skills and aptitude for advising were not discussed with them when hired. This is somewhat contradictory with the perception of the department heads who felt they discussed this issue when hiring new faculty. Only six of the 25 department heads reported that formal training for advising exists and three faculty reported receiving formal training at the departmental level. One of the most important findings was that at the end of the academic year, new faculty said they did not feel prepared to advise. Sixty-six percent felt they needed training to be better advisors, while 83 percent would have attended advisor training if offered. (SW)

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Last But Not Least: Academic Advising

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated perceptions of advising held by new faculty, chairpersons and administrators. The need for training faculty for advising was also explored. Although lip service is given to the importance of advising, when ranked against other faculty responsibilities, it was found to be "last but not least."

ACADEMIC ADVISING: HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

Academic advising, in the early days of American higher education, was considered to be an implicit part of each professor's instructional responsibilities. Faculty instructed students on what courses to take and why it was good for them to take them. They acted in loco parentis establishing and enforcing social, emotional and educational norms.

With the advent of the GI bill following World War II, colleges experienced an enormous growth in enrollment and the average student age was pushed upwards as veterans returned in large numbers to pursue baccalaureate degrees. These older students neither wanted nor needed the social and emotional constraints of an institution acting in place of parental influences;yet there was a greater need for increased support services on campuses to handle financial aid, increased numbers of students in dormitories and career concerns. Higher education offered greater diversity in programs and an era of specialization began.

Many functions were easily distributed to budget officers, custodial staff, and/or housing personnel, but the important function of academic advising became everyone's and no one's responsibility. It was obviously the responsibility and prerogative of the faculty; it concerned instruction. However, faculty members were exhorted to "publish or perish", so many published, leaving advising to ancillary offices. As many researchers in the field point out, advising is often reduced to a clerical task (Hailberg, 1964; Biggs, et al, 1975; Walsh, 1979).

In some colleges and universities the faculty continued to have primary advising responsibility, but advising became synonomous with scheduling which takes considerably less time and involvement than advising. In some cases, it was allocated to counselors or student services personnel. On other campuses, primarily at small prestigious liberal arts institutions, advising continued being defined as an instructional

responsibility and was expected of each faculty member. The 1960's and early 70's heralded even greater definition of responsibility. As rebellion against requirements and norms increased, colleges and universities provided less structured academic requirements and expected less faculty/student interaction.

Students of the mid to late 70's seem to have gone through what e.e. cummings would call a "semi-revolution." They moved from accepting no requirements, to pleading to know what the requirements were; from rebelling against imposed expectations to asking to have decisions made for them. Today's students ask for advice much more frequently than they rebuff advisors who offer help. Institutions of higher education have only begun to meet the needs of these students. Our response is still, for the most part, a response to an independent, older clientele. Faculty and other advisors are frequently heard to remark, "well, if the students would just read the catalog..."

ACADEMIC ADVISING RELATED TO RETENTION

Concurrent with these changing attitudes toward advising, there were dramatic shifts in enrollment patterns. While the 60's were a time of unprecedented growth in higher education, the 70's brought a reversal of this trend, leading many colleges and universities to investigations of why students withdraw or drop out. A variety of causes have been identified. Some retention studies also inquired into what leads students to stay in college. According to Alexander Astin (1975), one variable identified by persistors as influencing them to continue is a meaningful relationship with a faculty member. Improvement of advising, then, has been a target for many institutions which are trying to improve retention.

IMPROVING ADVISING

Faculty continue to be the ones who most frequently provide academic advising to students. Yet, for many reasons, this is the most difficult type of advising to evaluate and the most difficult to improve.

Most universities consider instruction and research as primary faculty responsibilities. The majority of faculty are prepared by their graduate education to carry out research. But for many faculty members their only preparation for instruction (teaching and advising) is the observation of good and bad instructors and advisors in their own undergraduate/graduate experience.

REACHING CONSENSUS ON THE NATURE OF ADVISING

Preliminary to designing an advising program is a need for consensus about the nature and definition of advising. Many discussions of advising seem to be based on the tacit assumption that advising is telling students which courses to take to meet core and major requirements. Other discussions imply that advising is considerably more than perfunctory, using the term "significant other" to characterize an advisor's relationship with students.

If advising is only the former, most faculty and staff should be able to advise with little preparation. In fact, advising could be mechanically handled by printed information and tapes. If it is the latter, advising may require the hiring of many persons to be friends, and most institutions will not be willing to appropriate funds for meeting students' social needs. A middle ground probably offers the best definition of advising. Advising is the dissemination of information about requirements, as well as the processing and internalizing of that information, requiring the cultivation of some type of personal relationship between advisor and advisee.

The development of advising in colleges and universities, its effect on retention, and the nature of advising is summarized by Janice Abel (1980). "Greater interest in academic advising has been brought about by the growth, complexity of our institutions, the threat of declining enrollments and the diversity of student populations entering our universities. Advising programs are no longer viewed as a set of scheduling procedures, but are now being established to assist students in development of their

total potential. Hardee (1970), views faculty advisors as coordinators of learning experiences involving the personal as well as educational concerns of students" (p. 151).

TRAINING ADVISORS

Writing about advisors, Thomas Grites (1978), said, it seems important...to insure adequate preparation of faculty to fulfill this responsibility (p. 1). While it is easy to make the case for some type of advisor preparation, it is difficult to find information on how this preparation should be structured. Virginia Gordon (1980), found that few training programs have been described in the literature although "administrators and the head of academic departments are becoming increasingly aware of the need for formalized, consistent training programs of academic advisors" (p. 339).

Jerry Wilder (1981), addressed the importance of advising and alluded to what this training might be expected to accomplish. "The training of academic advisors is the second key ingredient (selection is first) in the development of a sound foundation for any program of academic career advising" (p. 490). Effective advisors have good communication skills, know the discipline in which they advise, understand academic regulations, policies, procedures and practices, and are conversant with career options. Additionally, they are familiar with other campus resources where students can receive help. As Howard Kramer (1981) stated, a program for improving faculty advising works only when advising is supported as an important function (p. 9).

ASSESSING PERCEPTIONS OF ADVISING

George Mason University, The State University in Northern Virginia, is probably typical in lagging behind in responding to students' needs for increased advising services. A study conducted by Jo Ann Hickey (1979), reported that students were not satisfied with advising on this campus. A partial response was mounted by establishing an Advising Center. But the Center servies primarily lower division undergraduate students who are not committed to an academic major.

The present study was developed with two purposes in mind. First, the intent of this research was to determine the perception of advising held by new faculty, chairpersons and administrators. Secondly, the research attempted to assess the need for advisor training at George Mason University.

In the Spring of 1981, George Mason University faculty who were new to teaching were identified by the authors. Twenty-nine such faculty were listed in a computer printout from the Office of Institutional Analysis. Each faculty member was sent a 19-item questionnaire developed by the researchers. The purpose of the questionnaire was clearly explained in a cover letter and each person had the opportunity to remain anonymous in their response. Eighteen (18) questionnaires were returned (a 62% response rate).

A 14-item advising questionnaire was sent to all chairpersons, directors/coordinators in the 41 departments/programs at George Mason University. (This includes the College of Arts and Sciences, College of Professional Studies and College of Business). Twenty-five returned the questionnaire (a 61% response rate). Again, the purpose of the research was clearly delineated in a cover letter. When the data were examined, it became clear that in order to have a more complete understanding of attitudes about advising on the campus, university administrators needed to be included. The eight administrators in the study included 3 Deans, 4 Vice-Presidents and the President of the university. (Each administrator was interviewed by both researchers using a 15-item questionnaire and their responses were taped). All eight administrators agreed to be interviewed and no one objected to being taped. Therefore, there was a 100% response rate by administrators.

FINDINGS

Faculty

Of the 18 faculty who responded to the questionnaire, 7 had been teaching for 1 year, 2 for two years and 50% (9) had been teaching more than 2 years. Eight previously taught full-time, 3 part-time, 5 both full and part-time. When the faculty were asked

if their aptitude and interest in advising was discussed with them at the time of their employment interview, an overwhelming majority (15) said "No."

Twelve faculty responded "No" when asked if there is a formal procedure for training new full-time faculty in their departments. (3 responded "Yes"). The three respondents who said there was a formal training procedure actually participated in the training. Two faculty explained that in the orientation to the department, policies and curriculum were explained and the catalogue was distributed. Seven faculty reported that there is an informal procedure for training new faculty for advising. (Six responded "No" to this question). For three faculty, the informal training included advice from the chair and senior faculty. For the most part, new faculty ask colleagues when a problem comes up.

Eleven of the 18 respondents said they had specific advising responsibilities in their position at George Mason University. Yet, only 16 respondents felt adequately prepared to advise students while 11 did not. Ten faculty provided ideas on what would be helpful to prepare for advising. Two wanted better understanding of courses in their own departments as well as other relevant courses in other departments. Other suggestions included: (1) virtually anything would be helpful; (2) a formal program; and 3) training by professional advisors to instill confidence. Although new faculty on the whole did not receive formal training, and the majority did not feel adequately prepared, 8 rated advising as being Important and 8 rated it as Very Important.

Faculty perceive their chairpersons as thinking that advising is important. Three felt their chairpersons did not think advising is important. Nine faculty felt their colleagues thought advising is important, while three thought their colleagues did not see it as important.

Seven (7) faculty felt advising should be rewarded and seven (7) did not feel it should be rewarded. Three faculty felt advising, as part of university service, should be considered for promotions. On the other hand, two faculty said it was part

of the normal academic requirements. Although some are willing to be rewarded, 10 did not want to have their advising evaluated. One faculty member felt advising could not be evaluated formally. Two thought it should be evaluated by students, while two felt it could be done but did not specifiy how. Whether faculty are rewarded and/or evaluated or not, 12 respondents felt that the faculty need training to be good advisors (3 said "No"). To support the above response, 15 faculty would have attended a brief training program if it had been offered their first semester of employment at George Mason University. Although the majority (11) said such training should be voluntary, 5 felt it should be mandatory. Two respondents to the questionnaire felt that practical experience in advising would be preferable to "training."

On a scale from "Poor" to "Excellent", no faculty rated the advising in their department as "Poor"; 5 rated it "Fair"; 8 "Good"; 2 "Excellent". The new faculty at George Mason University see advising in their respective departments primarily ranging from Fair to Good.

Eleven faculty shared their views on what they thought would improve advising. The recommendations were diverse, but included such things as (1) orientation for new faculty; (2) better communication with admissions office; (3) having official advisors; and (4) it is unrealistic to expect faculty to spend much time on advising - especially with growing "publish or perish" sentiment on campus.

Chairpersons

On March 23, 1981, forty-one chairpersons/program coordinators of departments were sent a questionnaire on advising at George Mason University. Twenty-five returned the questionnaire (a 61% response rate).

While 14 chairs reported that every full-time faculty member in their respective departments has a specific list of advisees, in two departments this was not the case. Less than half of the chairs (10) said they attempt to assess a prospective faculty member's aptitude for and interest in advising. Fourteen chairs said that they make no

attempt to assess this aptitude. Comparing the chairs' perception of the interview process and that of a new faculty, we see that only 3 faculty said this area was discussed with them while 10 chairs say they make this assessment.

The majority of chairs (17) felt that advising in their department was "Good." Two felt it was "Poor", four said it was "Fair" and two said "Excellent." The faculty perception and that of chairpersons seems to be congruent. In terms of rewarding advising, the chairs were almost evenly split; 14 said "Yes" it should be rewarded while 11 said, "No." Similarly, chairs were almost evenly divided when asked if advising should be evaluated.

Chairs and faculty seem consistent in their responses to formal procedures for training new full-time faculty to be advisors in their departments. Eighteen (18) chairs (72%) replied that there are no formal procedures and only 6 said, "Yes." Although formal procedures for training new faculty in advising exist in few departments, 17 chairs felt there is a need to train faculty who have never advised; seven chairs felt there is no such need. Of the five people who wrote in responses to this question, two thought training for those who never advised should be done in the department. Two seemed to have trouble with the word "training" - one preferred the term orientation. All five responses indicated that training/orientation was needed. The majority of chairs, as the majority of faculty, agreed that there is a need for such training. Yet only six (6) chairs reported the existence of formal procedures and only three (3) faculty said they had any such training. Sixteen (16) chairs would encourage new faculty to attend advisor training if it were offered at George Mason University, while 6 would not. Three chairs were undecided. One respondent wants to review training before recommending to new faculty; another would recommend it if it was not called "training."

When chairs were asked to describe how students are assigned to faculty members for advising, 35 reponses were given. Nine respondents explained that students are assigned to faculty according to the major subject or randomly by departmental secretaries.

A balanced load seemed to be a prevalent mode of assigning advisees. The second most mentioned way in which student and advisor connect is by having the student express a preference (3) and graduate students are assigned by the graduate coordinator (3). The responses ranged from "someone being on duty during registration" to "chair does all advising."

Thirty (30) written responses were recorded in answer to the question, "How could advising be rewarded?" Seven respondents felt advising is a function of being a faculty member. On the other hand, five individuals felt that rewards for advising could include earlier promotion and better salary increases. Three people felt that advising could be rewarded by giving faculty a reduced load while 3 others felt reduced load should be given to selected faculty to handle all advising. One person felt extra rewards are not advisable.

The following were suggested by chairs when asked how advising could be evaluated:

Two people felt it was impossible to evaluate advising; two didn't know and two felt it could only be done informally. Suggestions for evaluating advising included a short instrument, written summaries of sessions, number of student contact hours and difficulties students encounter as a result of advising.

The method mentioned as most used in the departments to train new faculty in advising was teaming new faculty with experienced faculty. Other methods included advising packet handbook; part of faculty orientation to department; and department advising committee holding workshops.

Twelve people made additional comments. These comments can only be grouped loosely as the respondents addressed various issues. Two people mentioned that training would need to be limited in time since faculty are overworked and there are not rewards given for advising. There was mention of advising center being responsible for some of the advising with departments advising the majors. Three people felt present advising system was either counter-productive and students fall through the cracks, or system was too vague with advising center professional advisors needing more authority.

Table I shows differences in responses between chairpersons who have held that position for more than three years and chairpersons in that position for less than three years.

TABLE 1

Differences Between Chairpersons

Question	Less than 3 years		More than 3 years	
	Yes	No	Yes	No
#4 - Does every full-time faculty member in your department have a specific list of advisees?	47%	53%	78%	22%
#5 - In interviewing prosepctive faculty members, do you attempt to assess their aptitude for and interest in advising?	60%	40%	11%	89%
#9 - Do you feel advising should be rewarded?	87%	13%	43%	57%

There were also some differences between 8 chairs who considered advising to be Poor/Fair in their departments as contrasted with the 22 chairs who considered advising to be Good/Excellent.

Item 4: Of the chairs who considered department advising to be poor or fair, 25% assign advising to every full-time faculty member. 55% of the chairs who consider advising to be Good/Excellent assign advising to every full-time faculty member.

Item 5: 13% of the chairs who consider advising to be Poor/Fair and 45% who consider it to be Good/Excellent attempt to assess interest in and aptitude for advising in interviewing new faculty.

Item 6: 25% of the Poor/Fair and 55% of the Good/Excellent chairs consider advising to be Very Important. But 50% of the Poor/Fair and 18% of the Good/Excellent consider it to be Important. The combined percentages are Poor/Fair who consider advising to be important/very important, 75% and 73% of Good/Excellent chairs consider advising to be important/very important.

Item 7: 38% of the Poor/Fair and 69% of the Good/Excellent responded that their faculty consider advising to be important/very important.

Administrators

The eight administrators unanimously agreed that advising is very important. Five

of the administrators felt that the importance of advising to chairpersons varies by departments. Two felt it was not very important to the chairs while one felt it was important to them. The majority felt that faculty see advising as important but there seems to be a decline in importance.

Seven administrators ranked publication, research and teaching as more important than advising; three felt university service and grants were also more important than advising. Advising was ranked higher than only one other faculty responsibility - community service. When administrators were asked how they thought faculty and chairs would rank the same responsibilities, the rankings were very similar. Publication, research, teaching and grants were indicated as ranking higher than advising by faculty and chairs.

Six administrators felt advising should be measured. One didn't know and one said, "No." The majority of the administrators also felt that advising should be evaluated. Suggestion of how to do this included looking at results of advice given, look at student behavior over time. This type of evaluation is subjective and must be subjectively evaluated.

Four administrators felt that faculty at George Mason University are not rewarded for advising. Two said it probably is punished. Suggestions on how it could be rewarded included: consider it in promotion/tensure decisions; use it as a relief from other "chores" and assignments give faculty time or money for advising.

When respondents were asked what tangible recognition is given for advising, 6 said "None." Three said that while there is no tangible reward, faculty feel productive when they help students. One felt that the only decent payment is respect and gratitude of advisees.

Each administrator was aked to describe the advising system at George Mason University. One said it was amorphous and one said there is no real system. Two mentioned primarily departmental advising and two spoke of the advising center's role.

Several suggestions were made to improve advising. They include: (1) let advising become centralized with professional advisors; (2) have the advising center impact more on departments; (3) hire good advisors, reward them, measure and evaluate advising as we do with other faculty tasks; and (4) try to get more consistency in advising and tie it to general education.

When administrators were asked what they could do in their role of administrator to improve advising, the responses ranged from "nothing" to "support it more." Other responses included to keep people aware of it as a priority, to give it more prominence in personnel decisions and to sort out registration from advising.

All administrators agreed that faculty should be trained to be advisors. The primary role for training was seen to lie with the department. Two thought the advising center could play a role and one thought professional advisors would be best suited for this task.

The issue of the need to train new faculty for advising seems to have strong support from faculty, chairs and administrators at George Mason University. Yet, only a small number of departments have anything that approximates a "formal" training for advising. A preference seems to be to have such training take place in the departments. What incentive is there for chairs to take on this task? In addition, advising was defined in many ways by those interviewed. If there is no common definition of what constitutes advising, exactly what training will chairs be doing? What about faculty who wish to participate in training but are hired by a department where the chair does not believe such training is needed?

The majority of the administrators rated the overall quality of advising at George Mason University as better than average (from very good to excellent). Six respondents felt all faculty should be engaged in advising. Those who said "Yes" felt advising is part of teaching and every faculty member is expected to be able to advise. Those who responded "No" felt that some people are not good at personal relationships.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Although the majority of administrators, new faculty and chairs at George Mason University believe that advising is important, seven of the eight administrators interviewed ranked publications, research and teaching as more important than advising. In addition, three administrators also ranked university service and grants as more important than advising. This finding leads one to ask what "important" really means when referring to advising and how will advising improve if its priority remains low. This research supports the literature in that, philosophically, advising is given a high priority, but when balanced against teaching, research and community service, advising is given minimum recognition and rewards (Borgard, et.al, 1977; Mash, 1978).

A large percentage of the new faculty reported that their skills and aptitude for advising were not discussed with them when hired. This is somewhat contradictory with the perception of the chairs who felt they discussed this issue when hiring new faculty. Only six of the twenty-five chairs reported that formal training for advising exists and three faculty reported receiving formal training at the departmental level. What seems to be happening at least on the George Mason University campus, it what is known in the world of psychology as "double-bind." That is, the verbal message that "Advising is important" is contradictory to the observable behavior of: (1) Low ranking in priority of faculty tasks; (2) No assessment of skills by chairs upon hiring; (3) No formal preparation by chairs for advising. When individuals receive a double message they are confused in terms of which one to respond to and they remain unclear about what is really expected. No doubt, the university being studied is not atypical of what generally exists in higher education today.

One of the most important findings from this study is that at the end of the academic year, new faculty said they did not feel prepared to advise. Sixty-six percent felt they needed training to be better advisors while eighty-three percent would have attended advisor training had it been offered at George Mason University.

It was not surprising to find resistance by faculty to the notion of evaluating their advising. The assumption in higher education is that with the earning of a doctoral degree, the skills of teaching and advising magically are also acquired. The time has come to test the validity of this long established assumption.

The following recommendations will address the findings of this research:

1. Overall, academic advising has yet to live up to its potential. It is virtually important, and incumbent upon universities to explore and further study this untapped, rich resource. Additional research is needed in the area of academic advising in higher education.

2. Administrators, chairs and faculty need to look at the underlying causes for advisings' unimportance relative to other faculty duties. What are the perceptions of advising by new faculty on your campus? Facts and information are needed before successful programs can be instituted.

3. Assessment is needed on individual campuses of the level of support to improve advising. If advising is truly "important" what resources and rewards will be used to graphically show that it is not merely lip service.

4. Since more and more emphasis is on developmental academic advising (Ivey & Morrill, 1968; Crookston, 1970), colleges and universities must assess deficiencies in faculty advising and then consider programs to address these deficiencies.

5. Nine conditions have been described as being necessary for effective advising programs. They include: (1) Administrative support; (2) Institutional Policy; (3) Recognized reward system; (4) In-service training; (5) Information System; (6) Reasonable student load; (7) Referral System; (8) Appropriate Delivery System; and (9) Evaluation (American College Testing Program). Groups interested in improving advising must begin by assessing which conditions exist at their respective campuses.

6. By assisting faculty in becoming good advisors, resistance to evaluations in this activity would be reduced. Once we can evaluate the activity, we can improve it, strengthen it, change it and reward it! Evaluation of teaching, research and publications is a necessary condition for rewards. Until advising can be similarly evaluated and rewarded, it will remain a low priority for faculty and a marginal service/experience for students.

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